



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
In support of SB 203, AAC A State-Wide Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness Program
SB 204, AAC Campers' Education**

Jillian Gilchrest, Director of Public Policy and Communications
Select Committee on Children, February 27, 2014

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children, my name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am the Director of Public Policy & Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services.

Our member program could not be here in person to testify, but have submitted testimony that speaks to their experiences providing sexual abuse and assault awareness programming to students in elementary, middle, and high school, and to teachers and parents.

During our last fiscal year, certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to over 7,000 victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state, and 35,062 individuals with community education and professional training presentations.

I actually started my professional career as a child advocate at the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut. I met with over 400 children during my time there, and with their family members and loved ones. I also went to schools and presented to students and teachers. This is important work, this is hard work, but it is essential work and I applaud you and this Committee for addressing it.

Based on our experience and expertise working with survivors of child sexual abuse and their families, we thank the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of the goals of SB 203, to provide child sexual abuse and assault awareness programs in elementary schools. CONNSACS and our community based sexual assault crisis services programs have been providing educational programs to schools and communities for decades. We understand from our experiences that preventing child sexual abuse requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond teaching children about safe touch and how to ask for help.

Child Sexual Abuse, similar to other forms of sexual violence, is most often perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Sexual offenders use their power to control, manipulate, and coerce their victims. Child sexual abuse, again, similar to other forms of sexual violence, is

allowed to continue because people lack the skills and/or will to step up and step in. So, again, I thank you for taking this important step forward.

We are strong proponents of primary prevention education, a strategy that aims to prevent sexual abuse by providing a framework for healthy relationships and addressing oppressive and aggressive attitudes before they become violent actions. We think that there is great potential to reach more Connecticut children in a way that would help them to identify abuse, respond to abuse when it occurs, not engage in offending behaviors, and create a culture that will not tolerate violence.

This education needs to start early, be ongoing, and age-appropriate. CONNSACS member program, the Women's Center of Greater Danbury, has submitted testimony that describes the multi-session program they provide which uses a safe/unsafe/confusing touch curricula, formatted as interactive puppet shows for the youngest children. For older elementary grades, these dangers are also expanded upon in internet safety. They include primary prevention, which focuses on building social skills and character strengths that reduce a child's vulnerability to be victimized or engage in unhealthy behavior before there is a risk in every curriculum.

As the Committee continues their discussions of SB 203, CONNSACS would be happy to assist the Committee in any ways that would be helpful. In particular, we would like to offer the following recommendations:

- Engage CONNSACS staff and our community based educators in collaborative work to identify or develop programming;
- Encourage Boards of Education to partner and utilize community based sexual assault community educators;
- Expand on the bill's current language regarding age-appropriate educational materials in regards to content and to all grades, K-12;
- Build on the bills requirement to engage parents or legal guardians by charging Boards of Education to create learning opportunities for parents.

SB 204, AAC Campers Education

CONNSACS also supports the intent of SB 204, section 3, to require youth camps to develop programs to address sexual abuse, identification of early warning signs, proper procedures for notifying camp leadership about possible abuse, and current best practices for addressing and preventing sexual abuse.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on such an important subject and initiatives.